

was made of grass and debris with a few sticks; the eggs were eight in number and covered over with the lining of the nest (grass). The colour is of a light cream, dull white, or whity-brown, rough to the touch, oval, in length 2·7 in. x 1·92 inch in short diameter. I have never taken the eggs of this bird myself but Mr. Faithful informed me of a nest similarly placed on the banks of a creek near his residence near Goulburn.—(*Mr. Whittell's Coll.*)

41. NYROCA AUSTRALIS, *Gould.*

On the authority of Mr. Whittell who is well acquainted with this bird, and seems to have no doubt as to the authenticity of the eggs in question, I give the following description:—The eggs are large for the size of the bird, have a glossy look and feel greasy to the touch, they are of a light cream colour, rather oval, swollen, both ends nearly alike; in length A. 2·52 x 1·88 in.; B. 2·5 x 1·8 in.—(*Mr. Whittell's Coll.*)

GAVIÆ.

42. STERNA NEREIS, (*Gould.*)

Eggs slightly pyriform, length (A.) 1·39 to (B.) 1·43; breadth (A. and B.) 1·02. The colour is of a light yellowish brown stone colour, or creamy buff; one (A.) thickly sprinkled all over with black dots and irregular shaped spots, the other (B.) has large black blotches on the thicker end. These eggs were sent as those of the "minute tern" from Tasmania, where the bird is common. (*From Mr. Campbell's Coll.*)

NOTES ON A CRUISE TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS.

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Having recently returned from a collecting trip to the Solomon Islands it has been suggested to me that a short account of my tour might be of interest to the Society.

Our naval authorities having thought it expedient to investigate the cause of some recent murders committed there, H.M.S. Cormorant was despatched on the service, and an opportunity being afforded the Trustees of the Museum of sending a Collector, I left in the "Cormorant" on the 16th of April 1881, and arrived at the Solomons on the 26th. Crossing a narrow strait between the islands of St. Christoval and Ugi we anchored near the latter in a well sheltered roadstead. On the afternoon of the same day we landed and were hospitably received by Mr. John Stephens, after which we set out for a small native village situated on the shores of the Bay, about a mile from Stephen's homestead. Our route lay through extensive groves of Cocoanut trees, thickly interspersed with various kinds of Palms among which I recognised two species of Betle Nut, an Areca, and a Ptychosperma besides the Ivory Nut Palm common throughout the South Seas; a very large and beautiful species of Ficus was abundant on the trunk and larger stems on which grew great quantities of fruit; a large species of a very beautiful Tree Fern was plentiful. In the gorges and on the hill sides several species of Lycopodiums and mosses completely covered the ground with a dense undergrowth.

On arriving at the village we found it to consist of about thirty houses, almost uniform in size and design; they were constructed for the most part of split bamboos, and neatly thatched with the leaves of the Cocoanut and Ivory Palms.

While here we noticed that the greater number of the children differed strongly in many typical characters from the majority of the adults, this anomaly we afterwards ascertained was due to the strange custom of many of the inhabitants of Ugi, who in order to avoid the trouble of rearing their own offspring, usually destroy them at birth without respect to sex; preferring to adopt at a more mature age, the purchased children of another tribe, inhabiting the neighbouring Island. Even on the death of their Chief or head-man, in place of electing a successor from

among his own kindred or people, a youth thus obtained is frequently chosen and invested with the name, honors, privileges and power of the deceased, the last named attribute being, except on the occasion of some great feast or in time of war, merely nominal.

Polygamy is sanctioned, but is not very prevalent, the men as a rule, finding that they have quite enough to do to maintain one family. Yams, Taro, Sweet Potatoes, Bananas, and other tropical fruits and vegetables are carefully cultivated in neatly fenced enclosures of from two to five acres in extent throughout the whole of the Group. Pigs are highly prized and cared for, the Ugi women having been known to suckle the young ones.

A miserable lot of half-starved and mangy dogs are to be found in all the villages, and are much esteemed by their savage masters. As far as we could understand any form of religion is decidedly at a discount among the Solomon Islanders, vague ideas as to the existence of evil spirits or devils being the only definite form it assumed, and among the animated objects that are regarded as supernatural are Fire Flies. Cannibalism is still practised but only the flesh of enemies, slain either by themselves or some friendly tribe, is eaten.

I must not forget to mention a very beautiful species of dwarf Cocoanut Palm which I noticed planted on a low mound and held in great reverence, it was surrounded with Crotons, and *Dracænas*, and the mound on which it was growing was ornamented with Coral boulders and large shells; the nuts were small, about four inches in diameter and the leaves were remarkable for their beautiful golden yellow tinge.

Sexual morality is certainly at a low ebb among these people, and promiscuous intercourse with the unmarried females is permitted; once married however a woman is obliged to lead a chaste and virtuous life, however loose her conduct might have been previously; so strict is this law that the penalty of death

is often inflicted on those committing adultery. An instance of this occurred while we were cruising among these islands, a woman who had been previously caught, detected, and cautioned, having again been found in the act, was beheaded on the beach; the execution being witnessed by the Captain and crew of one of the trading schooners.

A peculiar and perhaps unique custom in connection with their marriage is worth relating; the bride being taken on trial for "one Yam," (a term corresponding with our year), and at the end of this period if she has given satisfaction to her husband, he pays whatever was agreed upon to her father or guardian, if not, as in several instances pointed out to us, the marriage is not consummated and the girl returns to her parents. Syphilis in a more or less virulent form is very prevalent in both sexes, but they appear to have no idea of curing or in any way mitigating this wretched disease. Honesty is one of the few virtues that can be placed to the credit of these savages, petty theft being of rare occurrence; this was exemplified by the careless manner in which articles of value were left about the Traders' dwelling.

Besides the produce of their gardens and plantations, their food consists principally of fish and several kinds of Mollusks that abound on the coral reefs surrounding the islands. Feasts are of frequent occurrence and often occasion serious disturbances. But not the least peculiar of their customs, is their method of disposing of their dead; the corpses of people of no rank or importance are simply wrapped in grass mats with heavy stones at their feet and buried; but the remains of a chief, or any one of note is placed on a platform erected for that purpose in the woods; two men being appointed to attend to it every day, washing it down until the bones are quite clean; the skull is then taken and hung up in the house of one of the deceased's relatives or friends, and the rest of the skeleton buried.

Grotesque, and rudely carved figures representing men, birds, fishes, and reptiles embellish the door posts and other heavy

timbers of their dwellings. *The Tabu* house of a village I visited contained a curious colossal sarcophagus—an immense log carved in the form of a shark—and held the bones of a young and favourite chief, to whose spirit the natives offered every season the first fruits of the soil.

Their rude stone tomahawks have long been thrown aside for the Traders' axes; two forms seem to have been employed, one an elongated cone, flattened towards the base with a rounded cutting edge, and bevelled on one side only, as in an adze, in which manner it seems to have been principally used; the other also somewhat cone shaped, but spreading out wider and more flattened on the cutting edge, which is ground on both sides, as in an ordinary axe or tomahawk. Not less completely have firearms superseded the bow and spear as weapons of war, nearly every Solomon Islander possessing some description of gun, and occasionally breech loading rifles of modern kinds; as they are expert marksmen, the possession of such weapons renders them formidable opponents.

After remaining at Ugi for two or three weeks, we sailed for the Floridas, another portion of the Solomon Group, one of which was the scene of the massacre of the late Lieut. Bower of H.M.S. *Sandfly* and his boats' crew. Having under threats enforced the assistance of the native chiefs in securing three of the principal men implicated in this affair, they were summarily executed, two being shot, and the third hanged in the presence of a large number of their tribe. The "*Cormorant*" then returned to Ugi and finding that by remaining here I should have more opportunities of collecting, I took up my quarters on shore with Mr. Stephens, where I remained until the return of the *Cormorant* from her cruise among the Islands.

During my stay here I succeeded in obtaining a fair collection of Birds, several of them being new to science, have since been described by the Curator of the Museum; among these novelties

is a very beautiful Pigeon—*Ianthenas philippanæ*; a fruit dove—*Ptilopus lewisii*; a small ground pigeon which has been named—*Chalcophaps mortonii*; a hawk—*Astur versicolor*; a starling—*Sturnoides minor*; and a king-fisher—*Halcyon salomonis*. This branch of my collection contained 200 specimens representing 50 species, among which were also many rare kinds not hitherto represented in the Museum.

Mammals were very scarce, an opossum—*Cuscus orientalis*, the species common throughout the islands, and a Rat, an undescribed species of *Mus*, being the only species obtained.

Fishes were plentiful, both fresh and salt water kinds, of the former I obtained about 20 species. Of fresh water Crustacea I only obtained two species. The reptiles collected consist of a common species of Python, one species of tree snake *Dendrophis*, one venomous species, and a few Lizards common to all the Islands.

Land shells were numerous; I found in all 28 species, several of them being rare kinds, which determined the localities of some that were of doubtful origin. Fresh water shells were not plentiful, but I succeeded in getting over 20 species, chiefly on Ugi. Ethnological specimens were the most difficult to obtain, a few stone Tomahawks similar to those described being all that I procured worth mentioning. I secured however, an interesting series of human skulls, and the head of a native from the Lord Howe's Group in spirits.

On the return of the Cormorant, provisions and coal being short, we sailed direct for Noumea, New Caledonia, and arrived safely after a short and pleasant passage. On arriving Captain Bruce unexpectedly determined to return to the Solomons, there to meet H.M.S. Miranda, before proceeding to Sydney. So after a few day's residence in the French colony I returned to Sydney in the s. s. City of Melbourne with my collections.
